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Biotechnology

French Corn Growers Show Strong Support for Biotech crops

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Report Highlights:

During its annual conference in Bordeaux, the French Corn Growers Association strongly supported biotechnology. They acknowledged that the cultivation of biotech corn has increased in France and urged the French Minister of Agriculture to adopt its biotech law soon. Other speakers including former GOF officials, had extremely harsh words regarding biotech opponents, comparing them to abortion opponents. The overall mood is that GOF and EU commission should take action so that France and the EU won't be left behind in the path of progress.

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The French Corn Growers Association (AGPM) held its annual conference in Bordeaux on September 13 and 14. The biotech issue was one of the main topics discussed. For the first time, several hundred corn growers openly expressed their support for biotechnology. This support follows the disclosure by the French daily "Le Figaro" (see Gain report FR5060) that up to 1000 hectares of biotech corn were planted in France this season. The audience cheered the French farmer, known as "Pierre", who publicly announced to the media that he grew GM corn and was happy with it. The president of the corn growers called for the Minister of Agriculture to transpose as soon as possible EU Directive 2001/18 into French law, saying that the farmers have already developed expertise regarding the management of biotech and non-biotech crop coexistence, thanks to research works done by AGPM from 2002 to 2004. Slides of Spanish biotech production were shown underscoring the point that biotech crops not only increase the farmers' profits but also benefit the environment with diminished pesticides use. With the many concerns faced by the corn growers, such as water restrictions and new diseases, AGPM called for more biotechnology research to address such issues.

Former Minister of Education Claude Allegre, who is a physicist by profession, had extremely harsh words for the principle of precaution as it is implemented in France, quoting it as <quote> "Piège à Cons" <unquote> (in French slang, "trap for idiots"). He also said that environmentalists who fear biotech crops such as corn would contaminate their crops are as senseless as if they were pretending that <quote> "a dog could mate with a canary " <unquote>. To our knowledge, never have such harsh words about biotech opponents been heard from a former French government official in a public audience. He even said that the opposition on the "Terminator" gene was wrong as such genetic modification was useful to prevent unwanted dissemination of biotech crops.

Other speakers compared the activists who destroy GM tests plots to those opposed to abortion who burn down clinics and shoot doctors. Such a comparison is interesting because abortion opponents are highly unpopular in France.

Overall, most speakers expressed their fear that France (and the European Union) may be left behind on the path to progress. They mentioned that China and India have embraced biotechnologies and urged French and European governments not to let biotech research continue to lag.